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STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAU
ON THE OCCASION OF THE FOURTH HUMANITARIAN
CONFERENCE ON SOMALIA

Addis Ababa, 29 November 1993

Mr. Chairman,

Once again, we meet to renew our solidarity with the people of Somalia and to make a comprehensive appraisal of the humanitarian situation in that country. The context in which the present meeting is taking place is relatively different from the one that prevailed during our last encounters. Today, one can be proud of the achievements of the International Community in its effort to stem the ravages of famine and misery and put an end to the humanitarian disaster that has befallen Somalia. Though not fully eradicated, the famine situation in many areas has been brought under control.

I wish to seize this opportunity to express my profound gratitude to all those who have, in various ways been involved in the performance of this huge humanitarian task and more specifically those of you who have again responded to the invitation to attend this meeting. Your presence here is a most eloquent testimony to our common resolve to continue with the noble task that we began together.

Allow me at this juncture to join you, Mr. Chairman, in thanking President Meles for having personally attended this conference and for his important address. More importantly, however, I wish to pay tribute to President Meles for his important contribution on behalf of our Organization, in the efforts aimed at achieving peace in Somalia. As you are all aware, President Meles has been specifically mandated by his peers in Cairo to follow the situation in Somalia. I am personally very grateful for the manner

in which he has been discharging this mandate and for the constant consultations which I have had with him towards this objective.

Mr. Chairman,

This meeting is convened to address our basic concern that the task we have embarked upon is not yet complete. The path to be covered is still long. Indeed, this is what we are reminded of in the list of items appearing on the agenda which bring to the fore the absolute need to move on to the phase of rehabilitation and reconstruction in addition to the relief operations which are crucially necessary in some areas.

It is gratifying to observe that among the main objectives pursued by the organizers of this meeting is the desire to arrive at an Agreement as to the manner in which the Somalis themselves could take over responsibility for the economic, social and institutional development of their country. This, in my view is of the utmost importance. Indeed, as I have stated on several occasions, the interest of the International Community in assisting Somalia can only be sustained and enhanced by the declared desire of the Somalis to fully address their problems and resolve them. I am, in that regard, pleased with the presence here of our Somali brothers and sisters who, I am convinced, will make very useful contributions to the proceedings.

Mr. Chairman,

The exercise we are engaged in can only be successful in an atmosphere of peace and security. This aspect is still of concern to us today. It is true, there has been some beginning of relative calm in some parts of Somalia. This has allowed for humanitarian

activities to be carried through with some success. However, it is also a fact that the situation in Somalia, and particularly in Mogadishu, is a matter of serious concern as evidenced by the series of incidents that have occurred in that country over the last five months and which have again pushed Somalia to the brink of tragedy with the death of several peace keepers and hundreds of Somali civilians. After the successful conclusion of the National Reconciliation Conference and the signing of the Addis Ababa Agreement, there was every cause to be hopeful that the Somalis had finally embarked on the path to reconciliation and peace. The wave of violent confrontations that occurred in Mogadishu destroyed the hopes that had been raised in the aftermath of this historic Agreement signed by fifteen Somali factions. Today, the polarization that prevailed prior to the Addis Ababa Conference is reemerging and seriously threatening the edifice of peace and stability so laboriously put together by the Somalis, with the assistance of the International Community.

Mr. Chairman

The incidents of the last five months have underlined the urgency of striving assiduously towards peace and national reconciliation. They have also demonstrated the relevance and significance of achieving this objective on the basis of a framework which has already been agreed upon by all the political factions and different groups of that country. That framework is embodied in the Addis Ababa Agreement which is the product of the National Reconciliation Conference held here in March this year.

In view of the difficulties and problems that we have encountered, it becomes all the more necessary that we look at the process of the implementation of the Addis Ababa Agreement, with a

view to take note of the successes achieved, correct the errors made, but above all to resolutely strive to ensure the implementation of the lofty objectives that were initially set. This approach of working for the implementation of the Addis Ababa Agreement implies that we assist the Somalis in finding out the impediments to the full implementation of the cease-fire by all the Parties; the progress on the establishment of the transitional institutions; the disarmament exercise and finally the involvement of the Somalis in the political process initiated with the signing of this Agreement. Only such a procedure will enable us to move ahead on the path towards the restoration of confidence and lasting peace in Somalia.

Mr. Chairman,

This has been given momentum by the recent shift in the approach to the Somali question giving emphasis to the pursuit of efforts aimed at finding a political solution to the conflict. We are all the more gratified as the need was felt to involve the OAU and African countries, particularly those of the region, in this exercise.

That is an important step which would enable us to come out of the present quagmire as long as a number of basic pre-requisites, are met in our approach. Firstly, the need to involve the Somalis; all Somalis without exception. Indeed it is impossible to establish and achieve lasting peace in Somalia in the absence of a general consensus with regard to the manner of conducting the process of peace-making, and on the expected results. To this end, we need to acknowledge the fact that the Somali conflict is above all the concern of the Somalis and that the role incumbent on the International Community is one of extending assistance.

Furthermore, there is need for general, simultaneous and complete disarmament as provided for in the Addis Ababa Agreement, without which all our efforts would be futile. It is this approach that has guided and continues to determine the line of action adopted by the OAU.

Mr. Chairman,

We meet today, as we have done in the past, to see and think together on the best means of coordinating humanitarian assistance for the people of Somalia. We want to see how that assistance can effectively reach all those affected and, correspondingly, how the mitigation of the humanitarian crisis can contribute to the other associated political and security process towards the restoration of durable peace in that country. Obviously, the success of our humanitarian mission is inextricably linked to the political process and unless the differences which hold the Somali people apart and in conflict are resolved, that mission is unlikely to succeed; however much we may try. Clearly, the International Community does not have answers to the political problems of Somalia. It is the Somali people themselves who can provide them. This is why I wish to reiterate my appeal to the Somali people to rise above the present differences and difficulties, and in the name of their country and its future generations, take the challenge of peace seriously. It has been demonstrated to them repeatedly that the World Community is with them. We share their anguish, we suffer the pain of witnessing so much destruction and death and as human beings we are collectively stigmatized.

Being with them and sharing in their tragedy is one thing. It is quite another to make peace for them. We can not make peace for the Somali people; nor can we impose it upon them. We can help, but

we can not replace them, for ultimately it is the people of Somalia who will have to reconcile with themselves, if peace is to be restored to their country.

Mr. Chairman,

This is a world beset by numerous conflicts with their attendant human suffering. It is a world of competing needs of resources and attention. For this reason, the Somali people, especially those who are leaders must always remember that they can not afford the luxury of time. The world cannot indefinitely wait while they procrastinate on peace. The world's patience, charity and magnanimity is not inexhaustible. I urge the people of Somalia, to seize the opportunity which the international presence in their country and continued concern to their problems offer them. Time is of the essence. They should use it well and move resolutely on the course of peace.

Mr. Chairman,

I say this because I am aware of the frustration and impatience which have begun to creep into the thoughts of many of us. The continued state of violence and the slow pace in the political process have not only slowed the humanitarian effort, they are also generating fatigue. This is understandable but not inevitable. This is why I urge the International Community and specifically the relief and humanitarian institutions not to allow the frustrations of the moment to prevail. We can not afford to turn our backs on Somalia. We have invested a lot of time, resources and effort. But above all, it is our collective humanity which is at stake. Somalia needs our help in this her most trying hour and we should continue to respond positively and persist in urging them to give the needed momentum to the peace efforts.

I thank you.